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ABSTRACT

Many countries in the Asia Pacific region have begun to adopt a lifelong approach to learning to ensure access to education and training and future economic development. Although lifelong learning will require substantial amounts of public funds, it is important that such initiatives not be limited to developing skills and competencies for economic development, but that education be regarded as intrinsically valuable in itself. Lifelong learning efforts should maintain a relationship between three major elements: education for a more highly skilled workforce; personal development leading to a more rewarding life; and the creation of a stronger, more inclusive society. To achieve these goals, Asia Pacific countries will need to reevaluate the function of compulsory schooling to ensure that students are provided with general knowledge for cognitive development and the acquisition of learning skills. These countries will also need to reexamine the role of families in supporting learning; the relationship between schools and the business community; and the relationship between schools and their communities, specifically the potential for cultural and artistic activities to foster lifelong learning. The institutionalization of lifelong learning implies that learning will extend beyond formal educational settings, demanding new partnerships with other learning providers, including colleges, hospitals, private sector firms, trade unions, and local councils. Contains 14 references. (BCY)

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Schools as Centres of Lifelong Learning for All

Judith Chapman
David Aspin

In: Lifelong Learning: Policies, Practices, and Programs

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Schools as Centres of Lifelong Learning for All

by Judith Chapman and David Aspin

In countries across the Asia Pacific region a multitude of factors is shaping the character of our societies and economies. In this context, member economies of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Forum are finding it timely to review their provision of education, to evaluate and reassess the role of schools in their societies, to reconsider relationships between schools, parents, business, commerce, and constituencies in arts and other cultural fields, and to re-conceptualise new roles and functions for educational institutions. Underpinning recommendations made in this paper for the development and direction of schools for tomorrow is the notion of creating "schools as community learning centres". These revitalized institutions would offer a range of lifelong learning opportunities to all members of what are fast becoming learning societies.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LIFELONG LEARNING FOR ALL

A number of Asia Pacific economies have concluded that a lifelong approach to learning should be supported and developed as a key response to some of the major challenges associated with the twenty-first century. Access to education and training for all citizens is seen as an investment in the future, a pre-condition for economic development, social cohesion and a foundation for effective participation in society and personal growth.

The work of international agencies, such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the European Parliament, and the Nordic Council of Ministers, has focused on a variety of themes pertinent to lifelong learning which have wide-ranging implications for Asia Pacific economies (see Chapman and Aspin, in press). These include:

- emerging awareness of the importance of the notions of the knowledge economy and the learning society;
- accepting the need for a new philosophy of education and training, with institutions of all kinds - formal and informal, traditional and alternative, public and private - having new roles and responsibilities for learning;
- ensuring that foundations for lifelong learning are in place for all citizens during

the compulsory years of schooling;

- promoting articulation between schooling, work, further education and other agencies offering opportunities for learning across the lifespan;
- providing government incentives for individuals, employers, and the range of social partners with a commitment to learning, to invest in lifelong learning;
- ensuring that emphasis on lifelong learning does not reinforce existing patterns of privilege and widen the existing gap between the advantaged and the disadvantaged on the basis of access to education.

THE CONCEPT OF LIFELONG LEARNING

The commitment by governments across the Asia Pacific region to the ideals of lifelong learning will involve the expenditure of substantial amounts of public funds. It is important that these expenditures be undertaken with clear understanding and agreement as to what is being done in the name of the public interest to realize the goal of lifelong learning.

One approach to conceptualising lifelong learning asserts that it is concerned primarily with the promotion of skills and competencies necessary for the development of general capabilities and specific performance in roles and activities that relate directly to economic development. Skills and competencies acquired through programs of lifelong learning, it may be argued, will have a direct bearing on how well workers perform their job responsibilities as well as how well they are able to adapt their general and particular knowledge and competencies to new functions. This economic justification for lifelong learning is dependent upon two prior assumptions: first, that lifelong education is instrumental for and anterior to some more ultimate goal; and second, that the goal of lifelong learning is highly job-related and economic-policy-dependent. This view, as we have seen from recent discussions at OECD (1996), UNESCO (Delors, 1996), the European Parliament (1995) and the Nordic Council of Ministers (1995), has been rejected as presenting a too narrow and limited understanding of the nature, aims and purpose of lifelong education.

A second perspective rests on different assumptions. Instead of lifelong learning being primarily an instrument to achieve an extrinsic goal, education is equally regarded as an intrinsically valuable activity, something that is good in and for itself. Incorporated in this perspective is the belief that those engaging in lifelong education do so not simply in order to arrive at a new place, but "to travel with a different view" (Peters, 1965) - to travel with a qualitatively better, richer and more elevated set of perspectives from which to view the world. There is wide acceptance that people engaging in educational activities are enriched by having their view of the world and their capacity for rational choice continually expanded and transformed by increasing varieties of experiences and cognitive achievements that the lifelong learning experience offers.

This second view has been adopted by a variety of community groups and, in addition to opportunities for lifelong learning through traditional institutions and

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agencies, there is a growing trend for lifelong learning activities to be offered through a host of non-traditional community initiatives. Lifelong learning conceived of and made available through these channels often offers people the opportunity to update their knowledge and enjoyment of activities they had either long since laid aside or always wanted to do but were previously unable to pursue; to try their hands at activities that they had previously imagined were outside their available time or competence; or to extend their horizons by examining significant cognitive advances of recent times.

This is not to suggest that lifelong learning is an activity restricted or even primarily directed towards those who have passed the age when education in formal or institutional settings has ebbed. In fact, cognitive and skill development can and should continue throughout one's life. This is an indispensable part of one's personal growth and development as well as a foundation for social and economic participation more broadly in society. Individual and community welfare is protected and promoted when communities arrange for lifelong learning activities to be available to the widest range of constituencies through as many channels as possible and in as many forms as are viable. Smethurst (1995, pp. 38-39) describes this well:

> *Is education a public or a private good? The answer is, neither: it is both. There is some education which is overwhelmingly a public good in that its benefits accrue very widely, to society at large as well as to the individual. Equally there is some education which, while benefiting society, confers overwhelming benefits on the individual learner. But much of education sits annoyingly between these two extremes, leading us, correctly, to want to influence the amount and type of it supplied and demanded, because society has an interest in the outcome, but also to note that it confers benefits on the individual above those societal benefits.*

The argument that lifelong education is a public good supports the notion that the availability of educational opportunities throughout the lifespan is a pre-requisite for informed and effective participation in society by all citizens (see Grace, 1994; McLaughlin, 1994; Smethurst, 1995). Similarly, services such as health, housing, welfare, and the legal system, along with education, constitute the infrastructure which people need in order to construct and realise a satisfying and fulfilling life, one that is supportive, inclusive and just.

THREE ELEMENTS IN LIFELONG LEARNING

There is a complex and interdependent relationship between three major elements or outcomes of lifelong learning: education for a more highly skilled workforce; personal development leading to a more rewarding life; and the creation of a stronger and more inclusive society. It is the interplay between these elements that animates lifelong learning and this is in part why lifelong learning is a complex and multi-faceted process. The process itself begins in pre-school, continues through compulsory and post-compulsory periods of formal education and training, and is then carried on throughout the remainder of the lifespan. It is actualized through provi-

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sion of learning experiences and activities in the home, the work-place, universities and colleges, and in other educational, social and cultural agencies, institutions and settings – both formal and informal – within the community.

For the effective development of educational policies and lifelong learning practices in particular within APEC member economies, this triadic emphasis requires a coherent, consistent, coordinated and integrated, multi-faceted approach to learning. Realising a lifelong learning approach for economic progress and development, for personal development and fulfilment, and for social inclusiveness and democratic understanding and activity will not be easily achieved.

The central elements in the triadic nature of lifelong learning are interrelated, and they are fundamental prerequisites for a range of benefits that members of the APEC Forum regard as important goals related to economic, educational and social policies. Subscription to policies for lifelong education will help achieve a variety of policy goals that include building a strong, adaptable and competitive economy, providing a fertile range of opportunities for personal development, and developing a richer social fabric where principles and ideals of social inclusiveness, justice and equity are practised and promoted.

To achieve these goals will require a substantial re-appraisal of the provision, resourcing and goals of education and training, and a major re-orientation towards the concept and value of the idea of "the learning society". Herein lies the major challenge for governments, policy-makers and educators in the Asia Pacific region as they grapple with conceptualising lifelong learning and realising the aim of "lifelong learning for all".

LIFELONG LEARNING AND COMPULSORY SCHOOLING

The concept of lifelong learning and the ends at which it aims will require APEC economies to consider the idea and institutions of compulsory education in a new light. As Hughes (1993, p. 17) points out:

> *Rather than being a unique period of schooling leading on to vocations or higher education, [compulsory education] is a phase in a lifelong process. That phase however has two key requirements: one is to provide a basis for further learning; the other is to ensure a continuing motivation for it. This may imply a greater organisational flexibility in approach than is the case with current schooling. It certainly implies a need for greater and more constructive student involvement in the planning and conduct of their education.*

Ball (1993, p. 2) maintains that, for the purpose of promoting and supporting lifelong learning, compulsory schooling must achieve two goals: the provision of a knowledge base and the development of meta-skills for learning. However, developing these skills, as any teacher, parent or student knows, is not easy. Great difficulties arise when more and more curriculum content is added to the compulsory years of schooling, in part because of the information overload and resulting conceptual confusion. Such an approach also risks diminishing the time and energy available

for the mastery of learning and research skills relevant to newer approaches for learning.

Increasingly, the compulsory period of schooling should be regarded as the phase of education in which students are provided with general knowledge for cognitive and affective development and for acquisition of learning skills which will be required for learning throughout the lifespan. More specific knowledge and skills can be taught as needed later in life and in places more suited to their acquisition.

In addition to evaluating curriculum, teaching and learning in the drive towards improving the provision of lifelong learning programs and opportunities, it will be necessary for APEC economies to examine issues related to the governance, management and patterns or relationships within education. Fundamental to this will be the notion of creating schools as "learning organisations".

Schools must model the best characteristics of learning organisations, a type of organizational notion now being accorded strong credence and prominence in many societies. In today's knowledge economy, the ability to learn has an increasingly direct and obvious relationship to economic and personal well being. As a result, if economies in the Asia Pacific region are to achieve the goals and benefits associated with lifelong learning, schools and other educational institutions need to be learning organisations and centres for community learning. Indeed, all constituencies with interests in the work of schools will want to play a role as members of the whole learning community of which they and their schools are a part.

LIFELONG LEARNING AND THE FAMILY

There are important ways in which families can function as a source of support for and a stimulus towards increasing the understanding of the meaning and value of lifelong learning. Campbell (1992, pp. 2-3), for example, has identified a number of family characteristics which encourage learning: a feeling of control over their lives; frequent communication of high expectations to children; a family dream of success for the future; recognition of hard work as a key to success; an active versus sedentary lifestyle; a perception of the family as a mutual support system and problem solving unit; adherence to clearly understood household rules, consistently enforced; and frequent contact with teachers.

The idea of the learning family and its link to lifelong learning has a number of dimensions and possibilities for the school. For example, there are important areas of content and values within the school curriculum which are vital to getting young people "started right". Families will understandably want to have a large say regarding what and how young people learn with regard to human relationships as well as the rights and responsibilities of being a family member. There is much that young people can learn about these issues in surroundings external to the family and the school. However, successful and effective learning in these and other areas is strengthened and encouraged by incorporating the educational opportunities afforded by the obligations and responsibilities of belonging to a family and a community into the life of the school.

One powerful means of encouraging this is through parental involvement in the school's activities. This may necessitate access to courses for parents, often using

school facilities and other institutional resources. There are many other ways of involving parents in the whole range of school activities, and schools and other educational institutions can do a great deal to build a sense of community as they function as "centres" for the various constituencies within the "learning community". Parental involvement in the learning environment establishes, between schools, parents and community groups, a sense of partnership in learning activities. In this process, parents must be regarded as equals when evaluating educational experiences and activities for children. Parental goodwill, including active co-operation, is enhanced when parents know how to participate and feel welcomed as full partners in the learning process.

The corollary to all this is that parents need to know more about curriculum innovations and other changes in approaches to teaching and learning. Only then can they support and assist with the learning process. In this regard, there is an increasing need for parents to take courses to familiarise themselves with recent developments in learning theory and new learning technologies. This is where schools can provide considerable support for lifelong learning in the local community. If schools and other learning institutions succeed in encouraging more parents and others involved in the learning activities of the young, the result will be broader acceptance of changes in schooling that result from the increasing emphasis on lifelong learning.

As schools contribute to the growth of new learning opportunities through cooperative activities with the family, there are, from the other side of the partnership, a variety of benefits accruing to the schools. For example, one of the potential benefits of greater parent involvement in the learning process is the links they provide to schools with other community agencies, groups and constituencies.

SCHOOLS AND THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY

Policy-makers, educators and members of the community need also to focus on the relationships between schools and the business, commercial, and industrial communities as well as other professional entities and organisations. The development of these sorts of relationships can have significant and positive influences on, for example, the effective preparation of students for the workforce. Partnerships in these areas create shared goals between educators and employers as well as trade unions and professional associations. In turn, this influences the behaviour, plans and goals of business, industry and commerce. These activities must be developed within the context of joint interests, and can serve as rich sources for broader community development.

Merenda (1989) has drawn attention to the different levels at which partnerships between private sector business and commercial interests and schools operate. These include the following:

- partnerships at the level of policy in which co-operative efforts are developed by businesses, schools, and public officials in order to shape the public and political debate about schools, leading to changes in legislation or governance;
- partnerships that focus on systemic educational improvements, including the

identification of needed reforms and the work to bring them about;

- partnerships that focus on management at the school level;
- partnerships in teacher training, in which businesses become involved in teacher and career counselor training and professional development, providing opportunities for professional educators to update, upgrade or maintain skills or to learn about the labour market in the community;
- partnerships in the classroom, where volunteers from business and industry bring private sector or occupational expertise into the classroom.

At this time, unfortunately, such a sophisticated and multifaceted approach to the establishment and deployment of school-business partnerships has not developed in Asia Pacific economies, at least to the extent described by Merenda. The forms that such relationships might take and the ways in which they can be developed for the benefit of those concerned are often poorly conceived. At the moment, industry gives a great deal to education, but this has for the most part been on a voluntary, sporadic and ad hoc basis. A new approach for the development of relationships between schools and industry and the opportunities they offer for mutual advantage needs to be cultivated. Clearly, consultation and communication between all parties is an important element in the creation of new partnerships which are vital for planning a range of lifelong education and training opportunities.

Following are suggestions for specific strategies, ways and means for business and education to co-operate:

- all parties need to develop a common vision and shared purpose for giving expression to positive and productive forms of their partnership, and partnerships between education and business should not merely be concerned with raising money, sponsorships and additional funding;
- students should experience a variety of workplace and extra-curricular activities so as to widen their appreciation for the challenges of the world of work and the demands of industry, business and commerce;
- successful school-business links could include work placement programs, the employment in schools of career counselors with recent experience and knowledge of industry, arranging teacher/industry placements and exchanges, and instituting an "adopt a school" program.

Such activities and relationships provide benefits for all parties and offer lessons for the wider learning community.

ARTS AND CULTURE FOR SCHOOL-COMMUNITY INTERACTION

Schools and other educational institutions can contribute to the cultural and artistic activities and institutions of the broader community, provide insight into and understanding of the ethnic diversity of our multicultural societies, and respond sympathetically to the religious beliefs and practices of different ethnic groupings. In this

way schools can increase racial and religious tolerance and improve social harmony.

Cultural and artistic activities can act as foci for community activities and lifelong learning and, in fact, many people are drawn to arts and cultural events in large part for the social interaction and creative activities they provide. It is important, however, that relevant cultural artistic activities be available for all social and ethnic groups regardless of location. Schools can be the neutral venue for cultural and artistic pursuits, thereby promoting wider participation in cultural life and helping to create an integrated community. The arts have the potential to provide meaningful learning experiences for individuals and groups who might otherwise feel marginalised, including those with disabilities, and schools can ensure access for these and other groups.

These programs can be hosted in community/school centres, places where formal and informal learning activities come together. Included would be courses and programs in a wide range of artistic and creative activities, including theatre, music and ethnic presentations. Most schools have the basic infrastructure and resources for this: a hall (often with a proscenium, theatre lighting and amplification), musical instruments or even a music suite, art rooms, a gymnasium with a sprung floor, maybe a dance studio, wheels for pottery and kilns, woodwork and metalwork shops, and other such facilities. Though these resources and facilities may be used primarily for traditional purposes during much of the week, they could be opened up to the community in the evenings and weekends in the interests of lifelong learning for all.

Other ways in which schools can provide opportunities for lifelong learning include bringing artists into the schools or hosting artists in residence programs, holding art exhibitions, and providing studio space for dancers, musicians and theatre troupes who would then perform for the community. Some schools offer "enrichment" programs where the students mix with arts groups, often becoming involved with the productions. Other schools arrange for qualified and artistically/culturally significant people in the local community to act as mentors for the arts and craft activities.

Cultural and artistic activities enhance the quality of life for everyone. They help develop rich sources of enterprise that lead to personal fulfilment, and often develop skills relevant for participating more broadly within the society. Further, in some instances, cultural and artistic exposure develops expertise that has direct workplace applications. The various ways in which the school can serve as a centre for the provision of and access to different forms of life-enhancing non-formal learning for the community are limited only by the range of ideas people bring to the discussion. Clearly, the field of arts and cultural pursuits is heavy with implications for the development of people within the community and the direct involvement of the schools and other community centres.

FORGING PARTNERSHIPS AMONG SCHOOLS AND OTHER LEARNING PROVIDERS

The institutionalization of lifelong learning implies that, while education may start in a formal, compulsory school setting, it will extend far beyond to a variety of other

settings, in a range of other institutions, and via a multiplicity of pathways. A host of agencies will offer lifelong learning opportunities: some formal and others informal, some traditional and others more innovative. In effect, lifelong learning subsumes the concept of co-investment.

A constructive lifelong learning system presupposes a series of connections between schools and other institutions all of which provide different educational opportunities. In fact, there are at the present time a wide range of these institutions providing educational services and opportunities in many APEC member economies. Included are universities, colleges, other tertiary education institutions, hospitals, neighbourhood houses, broadcasting corporations, private sector firms and industrial enterprises, trade unions, local councils, councils of adult education, and open universities. Societies are now entering a stage where the separate but complementary and mutually supportive contributions of a range of providers of lifelong learning opportunities are at work in the community. The planning and development of productive relationships between them is a matter of pressing concern.

In these relationships there must be clearly defined and flexibly articulated pathways for effective interaction and connections. These will enable institutions and students to build networks of linkages, and help avoid duplication in the same sector and on the same level. What is needed are integrated offerings between different levels and sectors. A good model is the complex articulations of the climbing-frame, in which people do not simply get to the top by one particular route through a single linear and uninterrupted progression. Instead they may choose to move across, backwards and down, before proceeding along and upwards towards the goal. People wanting to use lifelong learning educational services will need advice and assistance to move to and through different stages. Schools constitute only one element in the framework of educational opportunities, and they need to blend with many other network partners.

To ensure that lifelong learning opportunities are presented through a complex web or multiplicity of pathways, the various institutions need to offer a wide range of interrelated routes and opportunities for learners. These must permit individuality and provide comprehensive coverage. This implies coherence and complementarity within the group of providers, and must certainly be based on consultation and interactivity. This will require coordination and synergy. Such provision, and a wide awareness of both its availability and the ways in which it can be accessed, will enable people to connect with others who have related, though not necessarily the same learning needs. There will emerge a community of learners rather than, as is the case at present, pockets of separate interests and needs.

There is a need, therefore, to dismantle existing obstacles that prevent closer relationships between schools and other educational institutions. This is necessary for the successful coordination of efforts and resources among the community's educating agencies, so that students can move easily from one to the other and so accelerate their progress in learning. There will be a need for some nurturing in the early stages of collaboration if all of the many possibilities among schools and other learning providers are to be realised and capitalised upon. In fostering the ideal of life-

long learning for all, schools, community institutions, government agencies and private sector organizations will find their missions enhanced by espousing and implementing a cooperative approach when providing opportunities for learners, as well as in the establishment of various pathways and channels.

SCHOOLS AS CENTRES FOR THE LEARNING COMMUNITY

If the development of schools as principal centres for "learning for all" is an appropriate and sound method for offering lifelong learning opportunities, one of the first tasks is to link schools and the community more closely. In the past schools have been too compartmentalised, too isolated from the community. In fact, many of them erect barriers to exclude outsiders - an attitude well illustrated by the notices that some schools in the past put on their entrance gates: "Parents stop here".

Not only have the boundaries related to community involvement in the work of schools been territorial, they have also been conceptual. Teachers in some schools have inhibited the development of a diverse range of approaches and pathways for lifelong learning by holding fast to theories which support linear and compartmentalised progress through fixed stages of learning. This is embodied most obviously in the traditional and too often followed linear journey through elementary and secondary schooling.

Another barrier has been epistemological. Schools have focused on compartmentalising knowledge and styles of learning, separating learners in horizontally organised groups according to chronological age. As well, curriculum is often discipline based, and examined only in classrooms that are remote from real life experience and application. Modern thinkers argue that there is no epistemic warrant for such theories, and since the time of Dewey (1938) new theories have called these demarcation lines into question, and laid the basis for a more integrated, problem solving approach.

Given these changing perspectives, schools are now breaking down traditional barriers between the classroom and the learning that can take place outside the school. In the future, the structure and organisation of learning in and outside the classroom will change quite dramatically. Education in the future will provide more multi-skilling and student grouping will reflect a range of ages and language capabilities. Further, there will be increased emphasis on enquiry and experience-based learning. Knowledge and information is available to students not only from books and other resources located within the school but also from computers, the Internet, and a host of other information sources from around the world. As a consequence, one of the largest barriers to flexibility and independence in learning - the timetable as it is now structured - must become less dominating.

If schools are to become centres for the benefit and use of community learners, they will need to be opened up for broader access. This has implications for the responsibilities schools currently have to care for younger learners, and in many cases the explicit expectation placed on schools for creating a safe and separate learning environment. However, it can't be ignored that the physical barriers which schools erect, even if these are in response to a statutory "duty of care", act as obstructions to the aims of lifelong learning and to the many rich sources of inter-

action that can take place when learning "on the outside" is mixed with "learning on the inside". Achieving a balance between the custodial role of the school and the need to open up the school to greater community involvement will be a major challenge for school leadership.

The heart of this issue is that learning does not take place only in schools. Nowadays we are expanding our list of places and venues that are appropriate for formal, non-formal and informal learning: libraries, cultural and religious centres, through technology, in the home, and in work settings. Given the multiplicity of student needs and choices, and the variety of learning pathways open to them, schools and other learning institutions need to offer more choices through flexible programming, modularization, and other alternative instructional modes.

Schools of tomorrow must cater to modes of learning that give students the greatest access and the most benefit. Educators will use their experience, expertise and professional judgment to decide which approaches best suit the needs of particular learners. This will support the emergence of a recognisable community of learners where "thinking schools" and "thinking people" are linked together in interlocking circles of interest with a commitment to lifelong learning for all. In these schools all citizens will be encouraged and able to learn throughout the lifespan for employment, for broad participation in society, and for personal growth and development.

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